

IN THE CLAIMS:

Claims 1-24 (cancelled).

25. (Original) An acidified stable milk-based beverage containing milk protein in which said milk proteins are in a stable suspension, wherein said milk protein is added to a solution of a weak base, thereby resulting in a mixture, wherein said mixture is agitated under low to medium shear conditions, wherein said mixture has a pH above 7.0 prior to the addition of a stabilizer, wherein said stabilizer is added to said mixture, wherein said mixture is homogenized and cooled, wherein a food grade acid is added to said mixture under low shear conditions following homogenization and cooling, wherein said acid is added in an amount sufficient to result in a pH below 4.5, thereby resulting in a final product, said final product being said acidified stable milk-based beverage.

26. (Original) The milk-based beverage of claim 25 wherein said milk protein is selected from the group consisting of concentrated milk protein, whole milk, skim milk, condensed milk, dehydrated milk and nonfat dry milk.

27. (Original) The milk-based beverage of claim 25 wherein said milk protein is concentrated milk protein, either in liquid or powder form.

28. (Original) The milk-based beverage of claim 25 wherein said final product contains milk protein in an amount of 0.5% to 5.0% by weight.

29. (Original) The milk-based beverage of claim 25 wherein said final product contains milk protein in an amount of 1.0% to 4.0% by weight.

30. (Original) The milk-based beverage of claim 25 wherein said weak base is present in an amount sufficient so that said mixture has a pH between 7.0 to 8.0.

31. (Original) The milk-based beverage of claim 25 wherein said weak base is present in an amount sufficient so that said mixture has a pH between 7.3 to 7.7.
32. (Original) The milk-based beverage of claim 25 wherein said weak base is selected from the group consisting of sodium citrate, sodium malate, sodium lactate and sodium fumarate.
33. (Original) The milk-based beverage of claim 25 wherein said weak base is sodium citrate.
34. (Original) The milk-based beverage of claim 25 wherein said stabilizer is selected from the group consisting of carboxymethylcellulose, gum arabic, gelatin, xanthan, locust bean, propylene glycol alginate and pectin.
35. (Original) The milk-based beverage of claim 25 wherein said stabilizer is a blend of propylene glycol alginate and pectin.
36. (Original) The milk-based beverage of claim 25 wherein said stabilizer is added in an amount ranging from 0.1% to 2.0% by weight.
37. (Original) The milk-based beverage of claim 25 wherein said stabilizer is added in an amount ranging from 0.3% to 1.0% by weight.
38. (Original) The milk-based beverage of claim 25 wherein said stabilizer is fully hydrated, resulting in a fully hydrated stabilizer, wherein said fully hydrated stabilizer is added to said mixture.
39. (Original) The milk-based beverage of claim 25 wherein said mixture is homogenized at a homogenizer pressure of 500/2000 psi.

40. (Original) The milk-based beverage of claim 25 wherein said mixture is homogenized and cooled to below 30°C.

41. (Original) The milk-based beverage of claim 25 wherein said mixture is homogenized and cooled to below 10°C.

42. (Original) The milk-based beverage of claim 25 wherein said acid is selected from the group consisting of malic acid, lactic acid, citric acid, gluconic acid, succinic acid, tartaric acid, phosphoric acid, fumaric acid, and ascorbic acid.

43. (Original) The milk-based beverage of claim 25 wherein said acid is citric acid.

44. (Original) The milk-based beverage of claim 25 wherein said acid is cooled to below 10°C prior to addition to said mixture which has been homogenized.

45. (Original) The milk-based beverage of claim 25 wherein said acid is cooled to below 10°C prior to addition to said mixture which has been homogenized.

46. (Original) The milk-based beverage of claim 25 wherein said acid is added in an amount sufficient so that said final product has a pH between 3.2 and 4.5.

47. (Original) The milk-based beverage of claim 25 wherein said acid is added in an amount sufficient so that said final product has a pH between 3.8 and 4.2.

48. (Original) The milk-based beverage of claim 25 wherein at least one of a caloric sweetener, an artificial sweetener, a preservative and a vitamin, is added to said mixture, prior to homogenization, in a range of 0.0% to 15% by weight.